

# Group: Clean up Haw River

CONSERVATIONISTS PLACE WATERWAY 9TH IN TOP 10 OF 'MOST ENDANGERED'

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A fragile and in places modest waterway, the Haw River has run its 110-mile course through decades of environmental battering from industries and cities.

Now substantially restored from its worst years, the Haw still faces significant threats from polluted water runoff, degrading sewer pipes and health hazards in Jordan Lake that the state has been slow to clean up.

That's why a national clean-river advocacy group has named the Haw as No. 9 on its list of the Top 10 most endangered rivers in the country. American Rivers will announce this year's list on Wednesday.

It's not a list of the most polluted rivers in the country. Rather, it's a public-relations tool for local activists to use to try to save rivers that can realistically benefit from help before it's too late.

"It's to encourage people to take the threat to heart, and take action

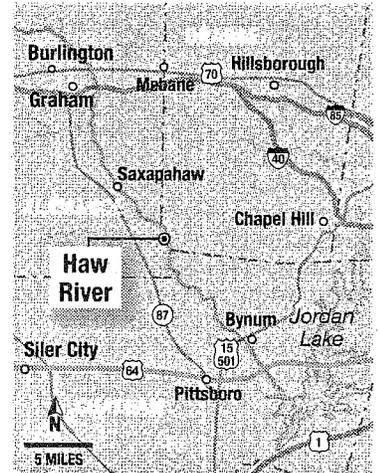


Joe Jacob, owner of the Haw River Canoe & Kayak Co., loads up paddles Tuesday for a whitewater canoeing class at Elon University.

so it's no longer a problem," Peter Raabe of the American Rivers North Carolina office said Tuesday. "In particular, for the Haw, the solution is relatively simple: Reinstate the cleanup plan."

The Haw is a tributary of Jordan Lake, a dammed reservoir that is a major recreation area and the drink-

ing water supply for five counties. In 2009, state legislators wrapped up four years of efforts and wrote a plan to clean the lake by installing wetlands, retention ponds and other stormwater controls in development projects upstream. But upstream municipalities have balked at the huge costs involved.



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Last year, the General Assembly put those rules on hold, and decided to try out new technology – floating, solar-powered rotation devices to clear the lake of algae. Environmentalists think the only way to clean things up is to focus on the source of pollution by enacting the

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rules.

But there has been little motivation to tackle an expensive problem that only gets attention when something goes wrong, as it did in February when a sewer line crack in Burlington spilled 3.5 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Haw River.

"Most of it is underground," Raabe said. "Whether you're flushing the toilet or watching water go into the drain, you don't have to think about it again. It's not a pot hole you're running over in your car every day. It's really easy to put it in the back of your mind and not have to worry about until there's a major break or kids swimming become sick because there's too much algae.

"We need a crisis to move some of these discussions forward. We're not in crisis mode yet, but if we keep going down the path we have been, there will be a crisis."

## Saving what you love

Joe Jacob has been paddling the Haw for the past three decades. Jacob, a former biologist for the Nature Conservancy, now runs a canoe and kayak outfitter in Saxapahaw.

He says the river looks better than it did before the federal Clean Water Act of 1972 started improving waterways like the Haw. But it's the less visible effects that build up over time that worry him.

"If humans lived to be 300 years old, we would see the impacts of what we do," Jacob said Tuesday. "Nature isn't working in cycles of 60 or 70 years."

Jacob said he started his riverside business to encourage people to care about what happens to the Haw. "If you don't love and care about something you're less like to defend it," Jacob said. "That's what we're about."

Jacob hopes the American Rivers list will further that goal.

"I am glad it's getting this kind of attention," he said. "It may hurt business but it may help save the river. ... Conservation is good for businesses – not necessarily so in reverse."

Raabe says action taken within the next year and a half could save the Haw River. He thinks industries could step up with new technological solutions.

"In the current regulatory climate we haven't been seeing that interest by the regulators to do those types of things," he said. "There are opportunities available for smart investment to actually resolve this problem."

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## America's Most Endangered Rivers

**No. 1** – San Joaquin River, Calif.

**No. 2** – Upper Colorado River System, Colo.

**No. 3** – Middle Mississippi River in Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky

**No. 4** – Gila River, N.M.

**No. 5** – San Francisquito Creek, Calif.

**No. 6** – South Fork Edisto River, S.C.

**No. 7** – White River, Colo.

**No. 8** – White River, Wash.

**No. 9** – Haw River, N.C.

**No. 10** – Clearwater/Lochsa Rivers, Idaho